

Danish Military Levying Rolls

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Background

Before 1700 the regular Danish army consisted mostly of volunteers. These volunteers were primarily foreigners. In 1701, and again in 1733, this "standing" army was supplemented with a national militia, consisting of young men drafted from the rural areas of Denmark. From 1733 to 1788 (the period of "compulsory residence" or Stavnbaandet), the vast majority of Danish farmers leased their farms from the owners of large estates (lords of the manors). These landowners were responsible to supply the national militia with a specified number of men from among those leasing or working on the inland. A few levying rolls are preserved from this period, but they seldom contain information as complete as the "later" rolls. This presentation will focus on the military levying rolls that began in 1788.

Lægds and Keeping Rolls

After the social reform of 1788 the large estate owners no longer had influence on who served in the military. The country was organized into levying districts (lægds) which are usually the same as parish boundaries. Each lægd was given a unique number within each county and usually carries the name of the parish. Be aware from 1662 - 1793 there were 44 counties in Denmark and the early military levying rolls were based on that county arrangement. In 1793 a reorganization of counties took place which reduced the total number of counties to 24, but in several areas of the country the old county system (of pre 1793 counties) was used in keeping the military levying roll until about 1806.

Normally whichever estate owner had the largest amount of land within the levying district was assigned the responsibility of keeping a list of the males living in the lægd. The sons of: nobility, large landowners, parish ministers and clerks, schoolteachers, and other prominent persons were exempt.

Incorporated cities and the island of Bornholm were also exempt from the military levying roll system. They had their own militia and are not included in the military levying rolls. As of 1843, many incorporated cities kept levying rolls of males who moved from the rural areas into the city (they were still obligated to serve in the army). Before the cities started keeping levying rolls of these males, you might find them on the rolls of the lægds adjoining the city involved. Copenhagen was an exception to this rule. They started keeping track of persons who moved into the area from rural districts as early as 1832.

In the years following 1788, the national militia was integrated into the regular army, and from 1803 the army was comprised mainly of young men drafted from the rural districts of Denmark.

The Navy Levying Rolls

Generally the navy was comprised of men who were from the coastal areas who made their living from fishing or the merchant marines. They used the same lægd organization as the army with some differences in the content of the lists. Before 1849 the men remained on the rolls as long as they lived. After 1849 they were discharged when about 50 years old, or once he was not employed with a fishing fleet or the merchant marines. If this was the case his name would be removed when he was about 38 years old.

Another difference between the army and navy rolls is the arrangement of the “complete or regular” roll which is taken every third year.

The navy’s complete roll has three sections which are:

- Roll of young men (*Sø Ungdomsrulle*). This roll lists young men from birth until the age when they are able to serve in the navy.
- Active roll (*Sø Hovedliste*). This roll contains the names of those men of appropriate age to serve in the navy.
- Extra or reserve roll (*Sø Extrarulle*). This roll lists the older men (the reserve) who probably would be asked to serve only in event "of a national emergency.

While the military levying rolls are complete for those people liable for military service from about 1790, it was not until 1802 that navy levying rolls were prepared in most counties. The counties of Odense and Svendborg began keeping them in 1796.

Description of the System

A complete list (often called a regular list) was usually compiled every three years. This list contained information for all registered males living with the lægd. For the years in between regular lists, a supplemental list was created to register all males born in that year (and the last part of the previous year), and all males who moved into the lægd during that same period. Those who moved in were listed only if they had been listed previously registered in another lægd. The rolls are arranged chronologically, and it is easy to determine which “supplemental rolls” are and which are “regular or complete rolls” compiled every third year. The supplemental registration numbers always begin with a letter (for ex. A216). In addition, be aware there is also a supplemental list at the end of each complete roll to record the changes that took place that year (move- in’s and births). By law once a male was registered, he had to remain registered until he was of age to be discharged. Thus it is possible to follow a male from one roll to another going forward or backward in time, tracing his movements from parish to parish.

During the period 1789-1849 males were enrolled continually from their births until they were around 44 years of age, unless removed earlier because of poor health, added responsibilities, or other legitimate reasons. Beginning 12 February 1849 names were dropped from the rolls when the man reached about age 38. After that same date, the child was not enrolled until he was confirmed or became 15 years old. After 1869 a name was not entered on the rolls until the male was 17 years old.

Content of Army Rolls

Each levying roll contains:

- name of the person conscripted
- his age
- place of birth
- residence
- height
- old and new serial numbers
- miscellaneous information pertaining to his service record.
- disabilities or exemptions from military service.
- notification of his death
- the full name of his father.

(If the person is born illegitimate, the name of the mother is given.)

Content of Navy Rolls

The navy levying rolls contain the same information as the army rolls plus information concerning:

- marriage
- number of children

In those cases where the person enrolled is a young man, reference is made to the place where his father is enrolled. Information on the person's shipping experiences and occupation were also recorded.

Column Headings for Army Levying Rolls

Old Serial No.	New Serial No.	The names of the father and the son.	The son's birthplace	Age, Year	Height, Inches	Present residence	Misc.
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Access

The Danish Military Levying Rolls are available for free through the Danish National Archives (Rigsarkivet) at: <https://www.sa.dk/ao-soegesider/en/other/index-creator/170/156352/16481031>